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MAILED

MAR 12 2009

OFFICE OF PETITIONS

In re Application of :
Szabo :
Application No. 10/728,743 : DECISION
Filed: 4 December, 2003 :
Attorney Docket No. 93988 :

This is a decision on the petition, filed on 10 February, 2009, for revival of an application abandoned due to unavoidable delay under 37 C.F.R. §1.137(a); in light of the allegations the petition also is considered as one under 37 C.F.R. §1.181 (no fee) requesting withdrawal of the holding of abandonment in the above-identified application.

The petition under 37 C.F.R. §1.137(a) is **DISMISSED**; and the petition as considered under 37 C.F.R. §1.181 is **DISMISSED**.

This is **not** a final agency action within the meaning of 5 U.S.C. §704.

Any further petition to revive must be submitted within TWO (2) MONTHS from the mail date of this decision. Extensions of time under 37 C.F.R. §1.136(a) are permitted. The reconsideration request should include a cover letter entitled "Renewed Petition under 37 C.F.R. §1.181 to Withdraw the Holding of Abandonment."

In the alternative, Petitioner may properly file a petition to the Commissioner under 37 C.F.R. §1.137(b) requesting revival of an application abandoned due to unintentional delay.

As to Allegation of
Unavoidable Delay

The requirements of a grantable petition pursuant to 37 C.F.R. §1.137(a) are the petition and fee therefor, a reply, a proper showing of unavoidable delay under the regulation, and, where

applicable, a terminal disclaimer and fee. (However, it does not appear that a terminal disclaimer and fee are due here.)

Petitioner does not appear to satisfy the **showing requirements** as to unavoidable delay—and does not appear able to do so.

As to the Request to Withdraw
the Holding of Abandonment

Petitioner's attention is directed to the Commentary at MPEP §711.03(c)(I) for guidance as to the proper showing and timeliness requirements for relief under 37 C.F.R. §1.181.

Petitioner appears not to satisfy the showing requirements set forth in the guidance in the Commentary at MPEP §711.03(c)(I)—and does not appear able to do so.

For reference: Petitioner's attentions are directed to the guidance set forth in the Commentary at MPEP §711.03(c)(I)—and with particularity to the requirements therein of statements of non-receipt at the address of record, search and non-discovery, with a description of docketing system and a statement of its reliability, and support for those the statements with copies of the docket record/file jacket cover and due date calendar/docket. (The requirements of the regulations at under 37 C.F.R. §1.181 also impose upon a Petitioner a duty to seek relief there under within two (2) months of the act complained of.)

BACKGROUND

The record reflects as follows:

Former Counsel failed to reply timely and properly to the non-final Office action mailed on 16 November, 2007, with reply due absent extension of time on or before 16 February, 2008.

Prior Counsel filed a reply in the form of an amendment on 15 February, 2008.

On 16 June, 2008, the Office mailed a Notice of Non-Compliant Amendment with a one-month period for reply and the indication that an extension of time could be obtained—the limitation upon extension being the statutory constraint (35 U.S.C. §133) and compliance with the regulations at 37 C.F.R. §1.134(c). Thus, extension of time could not take one out more than six (6) months from the Office action in question.

On 16 July, 2008, former Counsel filed a reply to the 16 June, 2008, Notice of Non-Compliant Amendment, which reply prior Counsel supplemented on 28 August, 2008.

On 8 October, 2008, the Office again mailed a Notice of Non-Compliant Amendment with a one-month period for reply and the indication that an extension of time could be obtained—again

with the statutory limitation (35 U.S.C. §133) and compliance with the regulations at 37 C.F.R. §1.134(c) such that an extension of time could not take one out more than six (6) months from the Office action in question

The application went abandoned by operation of law after midnight 8 November, 2008.

The Office mailed the Notice of Abandonment on 28 January, 2009.

On 10 February, 2009, Petitioner filed a petition (with fee) pursuant to 37 C.F.R. §1.137(a) averring unavoidable delay but also suggested non-receipt (properly considered under 37 C.F.R. §1.181), and a reply in the form of oath/declaration, fees, surcharge. Petitioner further seemed to suggest—but most certainly could not have suggested—that the reply period for the 16 November, 2007, non-final Office action could be extended “up to and including April 8, 2009.”

The problems that confronted Petitioner here include:

- As indicated above, the Notice of Non-Compliant Amendment provided a one- (1-) month period in which to make a bona fide effort to reply, and extensions of time could be available—with the statutory limitation (35 U.S.C. §133) and compliance with the regulations at 37 C.F.R. §1.134(c), which do not permit an extension of time of more than six (6) months from the Office action in question;
- The inability to submit a compliant amendment is not a basis for averment of unavoidable delay (*see*: the Commentary at MPEP §711.03(c)(II));
- The inability to submit a compliant amendment is not a basis for averment to support a petition pursuant to 37 C.F.R. §1.181 (*see*: the Commentary at MPEP §711.03(c)(I));
- Petitioner acknowledges that he was not Counsel of Record and was not in control of the application at the time the application went abandoned—and Petitioners always are reminded as to their duty of to inquire in support of their duty of candor to the Office in advance of filing papers in an application;¹
- In this connection Petitioner is reminded to have prior Counsel sign any petition to revive pursuant to 37 C.F.R. §1.137(b) (averring unintentional delay) and to make such inquiry as necessary to ensure to his satisfaction the accuracy of such averments when made .

A Petitioner averring non-receipt or timely filing must move stepwise through the requirements set forth in the Commentary at MPEP §711.03(c)(I), which provides in pertinent part (as to non-receipt):

¹ *See* supplement of 17 June, 1999. The Patent and Trademark Office is relying on Applicant’s duty of candor and good faith and accepting a statement made by Applicant. *See Changes to Patent Practice and Procedure*, 62 *Fed. Reg.* at 53160 and 53178, 1203 *Off. Gaz. Pat. Office* at 88 and 103 (responses to comments 64 and 109)(applicant obligated under 37 C.F.R. §10.18 to inquire into the underlying facts and circumstances when providing statements to the Patent and Trademark Office).

The showing required to establish nonreceipt of an Office communication must include a statement from the practitioner describing the system used for recording an Office action received at the correspondence address of record with the USPTO. The statement should establish that the docketing system is sufficiently reliable. It is expected that the record would include, but not be limited to, the application number, attorney docket number, the mail date of the Office action and the due date for the response.

Practitioner must state that the Office action was not received at the correspondence address of record, and that a search of the practitioner's record(s), including any file jacket or the equivalent, and the application contents, indicates that the Office action was not received. A copy of the record(s) used by the practitioner where the non-received Office action would have been entered had it been received is required.

A copy of the practitioner's record(s) required to show non-receipt of the Office action should include the master docket for the firm. That is, if a three month period for reply was set in the nonreceived Office action, a copy of the master docket report showing all replies docketed for a date three months from the mail date of the nonreceived Office action must be submitted as documentary proof of nonreceipt of the Office action. If no such master docket exists, the practitioner should so state and provide other evidence such as, but not limited to, the following: the application file jacket; incoming mail log; calendar; reminder system; or the individual docket record for the application in question.²

(and as to timely reply):

37 C.F.R. §1.10(c) through §1.10(e) and §1.10(g) set forth procedures for petitioning the Director of the USPTO to accord a filing date to correspondence as of the date of deposit of the correspondence as "Express Mail." A petition to withdraw the holding of abandonment relying upon a timely reply placed in "Express Mail" must include an appropriate petition under 37 C.F.R. §1.10(c), (d), (e), or (g) (see MPEP §513). When a paper is shown to have been mailed to the Office using the "Express Mail" procedures, the paper must be entered in PALM with the "Express Mail" date.

Similarly, applicants may establish that a reply was filed with a postcard receipt that properly identifies the reply and provides *prima facie* evidence that the reply was timely filed. See MPEP §503. For example, if the application has been held abandoned for failure to file a reply to a first Office action, and applicant has a postcard receipt showing that an amendment was timely filed in response to the Office action, then the holding of abandonment should be withdrawn upon the filing of a petition to withdraw the holding

² See: MPEP §711.03(c) (I)(A).

of abandonment. When the reply is shown to have been timely filed based on a postcard receipt, the reply must be entered into PALM using the date of receipt of the reply as shown on the post card receipt.

Where a certificate of mailing under 37 C.F.R. §1.8, but not a postcard receipt, is relied upon in a petition to withdraw the holding of abandonment, see 37 C.F.R. 1.8(b) and MPEP §512. As stated in 37 C.F.R. §1.8(b)(3) the statement that attests to the previous timely mailing or transmission of the correspondence must be on a personal knowledge basis, or to the satisfaction of the Director of the USPTO. If the statement attesting to the previous timely mailing is not made by the person who signed the Certificate of Mailing (i.e., there is no personal knowledge basis), then the statement attesting to the previous timely mailing should include evidence that supports the conclusion that the correspondence was actually mailed (e.g., copies of a mailing log establishing that correspondence was mailed for that application). When the correspondence is shown to have been timely filed based on a certificate of mailing, the correspondence is entered into PALM with the actual date of receipt (i.e., the date that the duplicate copy of the papers was filed with the statement under 37 C.F.R. §1.8).

37 C.F.R. §1.8(b) also permits applicant to notify the Office of a previous mailing or transmission of correspondence and submit a statement under 37 C.F.R. §1.8(b)(3) accompanied by a duplicate copy of the correspondence when a reasonable amount of time (e.g., more than one month) has elapsed from the time of mailing or transmitting of the correspondence. Applicant does not have to wait until the application becomes abandoned before notifying the Office of the previous mailing or transmission of the correspondence. Applicant should check the private Patent Application Information Retrieval (PAIR) system for the status of the correspondence before notifying the Office. See MPEP §512.³

Similarly, the requirements for the showing of unavoidable delay is not supported when the explanation is that a timely and proper reply in the form of a compliant amendment could not be submitted.

The guidance in the Commentary at MPEP §711.03(c)(II), provides in pertinent part:

2.Unavoidable Delay

*** “unavoidable” delay is the epitome of “unintentional” delay. Thus, an intentional delay precludes revival under 37 C.F.R. §1.137(a) (“unavoidable” delay) or 37 C.F.R. §1.137(b) (“unintentional” delay). See *Maldague*, 10 USPQ2d at 1478.

³ See: MPEP §711.03(c)(I)(B).

Decisions on reviving abandoned applications on the basis of “unavoidable” delay have adopted the reasonably prudent person standard in determining if the delay was unavoidable:

The word ‘unavoidable’ . . . is applicable to ordinary human affairs, and requires no more or greater care or diligence than is generally used and observed by prudent and careful men in relation to their most important business. It permits them in the exercise of this care to rely upon the ordinary and trustworthy agencies of mail and telegraph, worthy and reliable employees, and such other means and instrumentalities as are usually employed in such important business. If unexpectedly, or through the unforeseen fault or imperfection of these agencies and instrumentalities, there occurs a failure, it may properly be said to be unavoidable, all other conditions of promptness in its rectification being present.

In re Mattullath, 38 App. D.C. 497, 514-15 (1912)(quoting Pratt, 1887 Dec. Comm’r Pat. 31, 32-33 (1887)); see also Winkler v. Ladd, 221 F. Supp. 550, 552, 138 USPQ 666, 667-68 (D.D.C. 1963), aff’d, 143 USPQ 172 (D.C. Cir. 1963); Ex parte Henrich, 1913 Dec. Comm’r Pat. 139, 141 (1913). In addition, decisions on revival are made on a “case-by-case basis, taking all the facts and circumstances into account.” Smith v. Mossinghoff, 671 F.2d 533, 538, 213 USPQ 977, 982 (D.C. Cir. 1982). Finally, a petition cannot be granted where a petitioner has failed to meet his or her burden of establishing that the delay was “unavoidable.” Haines v. Quigg, 673 F. Supp. 314, 316-17, 5 USPQ2d 1130, 1131-32 (N.D. Ind. 1987).

A delay resulting from an error (e.g., a docketing error) on the part of an employee in the performance of a clerical function may provide the basis for a showing of “unavoidable” delay, provided it is shown that:

- (A) the error was the cause of the delay at issue;
- (B) there was in place a business routine for performing the clerical function that could reasonably be relied upon to avoid errors in its performance; and
- (C) the employee was sufficiently trained and experienced with regard to the function and routine for its performance that reliance upon such employee represented the exercise of due care.

See In re Egbers, 6 USPQ2d 1869, 1872 (Comm’r Pat. 1988), rev’d on other grounds sub nom., Theodor Groz & Sohne & Ernst Bechert Nadelfabrik KG v. Quigg, 10 USPQ2d 1787 (D.D.C. 1988); In re Katrapat, 6 USPQ2d 1863, 1867-68 (Comm’r Pat. 1988). For example, where an application becomes abandoned as a consequence of a change of correspondence address (the Office action being mailed to the old, uncorrected address and failing to reach the applicant in sufficient time to permit a timely reply) an adequate showing of “unavoidable” delay will require a showing that due care was taken to adhere to the requirement for prompt notification in each concerned application of the change of address (see MPEP § 601.03), and must include an adequate showing that a timely

notification of the change of address was filed in the application concerned, and in a manner reasonably calculated to call attention to the fact that it was a notification of a change of address. The following do not constitute proper notification of a change in correspondence address:

(A) the mere inclusion, in a paper filed in an application for another purpose, of an address differing from the previously provided correspondence address, without mention of the fact that an address change was being made;

(B) the notification on a paper listing plural applications as being affected (except as provided for under the Customer Number practice - see MPEP § 403); or

(C) the lack of notification, or belated notification, to the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office of the change in correspondence address.

Delay resulting from the lack of knowledge or improper application of the patent statute, rules of practice or the MPEP, however, does not constitute “unavoidable” delay. See *Haines*, 673 F. Supp. at 317, 5 USPQ2d at 1132; *Vincent v. Mossinghoff*, 230 USPQ 621, 624 (D.D.C. 1985); *Smith v. Diamond*, 209 USPQ 1091 (D.D.C. 1981); *Potter v. Dann*, 201 USPQ 574 (D.D.C. 1978); *Ex parte Murray*, 1891 Dec. Comm’r Pat. 130, 131 (1891). For example, as 37 C.F.R. 1.116 and 1.135(b) are manifest that proceedings concerning an amendment after final rejection will not operate to avoid abandonment of the application in the absence of a timely and proper appeal, a delay is not “unavoidable” when the applicant simply permits the maximum extendable statutory period for reply to a final Office action to expire while awaiting a notice of allowance or other action.

Likewise, as a “reasonably prudent person” would file papers or fees in compliance with 37 C.F.R. §1.8 or §1.10 to ensure their timely filing in the USPTO, as well as preserve adequate evidence of such filing, a delay caused by an applicant’s failure to file papers or fees in compliance with 37 C.F.R. §1.8 and §1.10 does not constitute “unavoidable” delay. See *Krahn*, 15 USPQ2d at 1825. Finally, a delay caused by an applicant’s lack of knowledge or improper application of the patent statute, rules of practice or the MPEP is not rendered “unavoidable” due to: (A) the applicant’s reliance upon oral advice from USPTO employees; or (B) the USPTO’s failure to advise the applicant of any deficiency in sufficient time to permit the applicant to take corrective action. See *In re Sivertz*, 227 USPQ 255, 256 (Comm’r Pat. 1985).

35 U.S.C. §133 and §151 each require a showing that the “delay” was “unavoidable,” which requires not only a showing that the delay which resulted in the abandonment of the application was unavoidable, but also a showing of unavoidable delay until the filing of a petition to revive. See *In re Application of Takao*, 17 USPQ2d 1155 (Comm’r Pat. 1990).

The burden of continuing the process of presenting a grantable petition in a timely manner likewise remains with the applicant until the applicant is informed that the peti-

tion is granted. *Id.* at 1158. Thus, an applicant seeking to revive an “unavoidably” abandoned application must cause a petition under 37 C.F.R. §1.137(a) to be filed without delay (i.e., promptly upon becoming notified, or otherwise becoming aware, of the abandonment of the application).

An applicant who fails to file a petition under 37 C.F.R. §1.137(a) “promptly” upon becoming notified, or otherwise becoming aware, of the abandonment of the application will not be able to show that the entire delay in filing the required reply from the due date for the reply until the filing of a grantable petition pursuant to 37 C.F.R. §1.137(a) was unavoidable.

Out of an abundance of caution, Applicants always are reminded that those registered to practice and all others who make representations before the Office must inquire into the underlying facts of representations made to the Office and support averments with the appropriate documentation—since all owe to the Office the continuing duty to disclose.⁴

The availability of applications and application papers online to applicants/practitioners who diligently associate their Customer Number with the respective application(s) now provides an applicant/practitioner on-demand information as to events/transactions in an application.

STATUTES, REGULATIONS

Congress has authorized the Commissioner to “revive an application if the delay is shown to the satisfaction of the Commissioner to have been “unavoidable.” 35 U.S.C. §133 (1994). And the regulations at 37 C.F.R. §1.137(a) and (b) set forth the requirements for a Petitioner to revive a previously unavoidably or unintentionally, respectively, abandoned application.^{5, 6}

Moreover, the Office has set forth in the Commentary at MPEP §711.03(c)(I) the showing and timeliness requirements for a proper showing for relief under 37 C.F.R. §1.181 in these matters.

⁴ See supplement of 17 June, 1999. The Patent and Trademark Office is relying on Applicant’s duty of candor and good faith and accepting a statement made by Applicant. See Changes to Patent Practice and Procedure, 62 Fed. Reg. at 53160 and 53178, 1203 Off. Gaz. Pat. Office at 88 and 103 (responses to comments 64 and 109)(applicant obligated under 37 C.F.R. §10.18 to inquire into the underlying facts and circumstances when providing statements to the Patent and Trademark Office).

⁵ See: Changes to Patent Practice and Procedure; Final Rule Notice, 62 Fed. Reg. at 53158-59 (October 10, 1997), 1203 Off. Gaz. Pat. Office at 86-87 (October 21, 1997).

⁶ The language of 35 U.S.C. §133 and 37 C.F.R. §1.137(a) is clear, unambiguous, and without qualification: the delay in tendering the reply to the outstanding Office action, as well as filing the first petition seeking revival, must have been unavoidable for the reply now to be accepted on petition. (Therefore, by example, an unavoidable delay in the payment of the Filing Fee might occur if a reply is shipped by the US Postal Service, but due to catastrophic accident, the delivery is not made.) Delays in responding properly raise the question whether delays are unavoidable. Where there is a question whether the delay was unavoidable, Petitioners must meet the burden of establishing that the delay was unavoidable within the meaning of 35 U.S.C. §133 and 37 C.F.R. §1.137(a) And the Petitioner must be diligent in attending to the matter. Failure to do so does not constitute the care required under Pratt, and so cannot satisfy the test for diligence and due care. (By contrast, unintentional delays are those that do not satisfy the very strict statutory and regulatory requirements of unavoidable delay, and also, by definition, are not intentional.))

Decisions on reviving abandoned applications on the basis of “unavoidable” delay have adopted the reasonably prudent person standard in determining if the delay was unavoidable:

The word ‘unavoidable’ . . . is applicable to ordinary human affairs, and requires no more or greater care or diligence than is generally used and observed by prudent and careful men in relation to their most important business. It permits them in the exercise of this care to rely upon the ordinary and trustworthy agencies of mail and telegraph, worthy and reliable employees, and such other means and instrumentalities as are usually employed in such important business. If unexpectedly, or through the unforeseen fault or imperfection of these agencies and instrumentalities, there occurs a failure, it may properly be said to be unavoidable, all other conditions of promptness in its rectification being present.⁷

As to Allegations of
Unavoidable Delay

The requirements pursuant to 37 C.F.R. §1.137(a) are petition, fee, proper reply and showing of unavoidable delay. It appears that Petitioner has failed to make the showing as to unavoidable delay—and appears unable to do so.

Allegations as to the Request to
Withdraw the Holding of Abandonment

The guidance in the Commentary at MPEP §711.03(c)(I) specifies the showing required and how and when it is to be made and supported.

Petitioner appears not to have made the showing required—and does not appear to be able to do so.

CONCLUSION

Accordingly, the petition under 37 C.F.R. §1.137(a) is **dismissed**; and the petition as considered under 37 C.F.R. §1.181 is **dismissed**.

⁷ In re Mattullath, 38 App. D.C. 497, 514-15 (1912)(quoting Ex parte Pratt, 1887 Dec. Comm’r Pat. 31, 32-33 (1887)); see also Winkler v. Ladd, 221 F. Supp. 550, 552, 138 USPQ 666, 167-68 (D.D.C. 1963), aff’d, 143 USPQ 172 (D.C. Cir. 1963); Ex parte Henrich, 1913 Dec. Comm’r Pat. 139, 141 (1913). In addition, decisions on revival are made on a “case-by-case basis, taking all the facts and circumstances into account.” Smith v. Mossinghoff, 671 F.2d 533, 538, 213 USPQ 977, 982 (D.C. Cir. 1982). Finally, a petition cannot be granted where a petitioner has failed to meet his or her burden of establishing that the delay was “unavoidable.” Haines v. Quigg, 673 F. Supp. 314, 316-17, 5 USPQ2d 1130, 1131-32 (N.D. Ind. 1987).

ALTERNATIVE VENUE

Should Petitioner wish to revive the application, Petitioner may wish to properly file a petition to the Commissioner requesting revival of an application abandoned due to unintentional delay under 37 C.F.R. §1.137(b). (See: http://www.uspto.gov/web/offices/pac/mpep/documents/0700_711_03_c.htm#sect711.03c)

A petition to revive on the grounds of unintentional delay must be filed promptly and such petition must be accompanied by the reply, the petition fee, a statement that “the entire delay in filing the required reply from the due date for the reply until the filing of a grantable petition was unintentional” (the statement is in the form available online), and a terminal disclaimer and fee where appropriate.

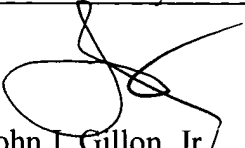
Further correspondence with respect to this matter should be addressed as follows:

By Mail: Mail Stop PETITION
 Commissioner for Patents
 P. O. Box 1450
 Alexandria, VA 22313-1450

By hand: U. S. Patent and Trademark Office
 Customer Service Window, Mail Stop Petitions
 Randolph Building
 401 Dulany Street
 Alexandria, VA 22314

By facsimile: **(571) 273-8300**
 Attn: Office of Petitions

Telephone inquiries regarding this decision may be directed to the undersigned at (571) 272-3214—it is noted, however, that all practice before the Office is in writing (see: 37 C.F.R. §1.2⁸) and the proper authority for action on any matter in this regard are the statutes (35 U.S.C.), regulations (37 C.F.R.) and the commentary on policy (MPEP). Therefore, no telephone discussion may be controlling or considered authority for Petitioner's action(s).



/John J. Gillon, Jr./
John J. Gillon, Jr.
Senior Attorney
Office of Petitions

⁸ The regulations at 37 C.F.R. §1.2 provide:

§1.2 Business to be transacted in writing.

All business with the Patent and Trademark Office should be transacted in writing. The personal attendance of applicants or their attorneys or agents at the Patent and Trademark Office is unnecessary. The action of the Patent and Trademark Office will be based exclusively on the written record in the Office. No attention will be paid to any alleged oral promise, stipulation, or understanding in relation to which there is disagreement or doubt.